

Message Text

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SUBJECT: INR'S ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ISRAELI GOVERNMENT
CRISIS AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON SYRIAN-ISRAELI
DISENGAGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

REF: STATE 69601

1. INR CONCURS WITH JUDGMENT IN REFTEL THAT MEIR-DAYAN
GOVERNMENT HAS SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE OF SUR-
VIVING LATEST CRISIS. WE BASE THIS ON AWARENESS BY
POLITICIANS OF GENERAL ISRAELI SENTIMENT AGAINST NEW ELEC-
TIONS SO SOON AFTER LAST VOTE IN DECEMBER, AND ON UN-
DOUBTED ALL-OUT EFFORT WHICH MRS. MEIR WILL MAKE TO
PATCH UP HER CABINET. IN SIMILAR PAST EXERCISES OF
BRINKSMANSHIP BY CONTENDING ISRAELI LEADERS, SHE HAS
ACHIEVED LAST MINUTE SUCCESSES, AND SHE WILL SURELY
BE ABLE TO SCORE SOME POINTS BY INVOKING THE SENSE OF
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PATRIOTIC RESPONSIBILITY OF ALIGNMENT POLITICIANS TO AVOID

A FRATRICIDAL SHOWDOWN IN THE MIDST OF PRESENT ACUTE EXTERNAL DANGERS.

2. NONETHELESS, THE BALANCE WILL BE CLOSE, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HER FAILURE IS CONSIDERABLE. THE KNESSET DEBATE ON THE AGRANAT REPORT BEGINS ON APRIL 11, AND, IF SHE HAS NOT TIED DOWN THE PRIMA DONNAS IN A NEW COMPROMISE UNDERSTANDING BY THEN, THE STRAINS OF AN UNINHIBITED DEBATE

ARE LIKELY TO TEAR HER OWN PARTY AND HER COALITION APART. AFTER ALL, IT WAS VERY TOUCH AND GO IN THE CABINET FORMATION PERIOD IN FEBRUARY-MARCH WHETHER DAYAN AND HIS RAFI FACTION WOULD REJOIN THE CABINET AND WHETHER THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY WOULD ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS THAN A GRAND COALITION WITH LIKUD. DAYAN IS NOW SMARTING UNDER ALL-OUT BLASTS FROM HIS LABOR "COLLEAGUES". HIS WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE IS UNDOUBTEDLY MINIMAL, AND HIS OPPONENTS HAVE CONSCIOUSLY PUT THEMSELVES OUT ON A LIMB FROM WHICH RETREAT WILL BE POLITICALLY PAINFUL. ONE "SOLUTION" WHICH MRS. MEIR IS APPARENTLY ALREADY FLOATING WOULD INVOLVE DAYAN'S TRANSFER TO ANOTHER MINISTRY INSTEAD OF DEFENSE, BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL HOW MUCH CHANCE THIS SCHEME FOR A RECONSTITUTED CABINET HAS.

3. IF MRS. MEIR SUCCEEDS ONCE MORE IN PUTTING A LID ON

THE SEETHING ANTAGONISMS WITHIN THE ALIGNMENT, THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY GO ON MUCH AS BEFORE. THIS WILL INCLUDE ITS HANDLING OF THE GOLAN NEGOTIATIONS, WHERE THE HARD DECISIONS WHICH WILL FACE THE CABINET ARE NOT, AT LEAST YET, THE SUBJECT OF MUCH FACTIONAL ACRIMONY. NOR SHOULD DAYAN'S STATUS AS AN ACTIVE PROPONENT OF SOME "SUITABLE" DISENGAGEMENT DEAL BE AFFECTED.

4. IF THE BUBBLING CAULDRON ESCAPES MRS. MEIR'S CONTROL, I.E., IF THE RAFI FACTION STICKS TO DAYAN AND IF THEIR SPLIT WITH THE OTHER ALIGNMENT LEADERS BECOMES IRREVERSIBLE, A NEW ELECTION SEEMS INEVITABLE. THE ARITHMETIC NEEDED FOR A LABOR-LED PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WILL NOT STRETCH TO ALLOW ANY COALITION WITHOUT RAFI, EXCEPT AN

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ALL-PARTY REGIME, WHICH MRS. MEIR OR ALTERNATIVE PRIME MINISTERS FROM HER CAMP PLUS THEIR SUPPORTERS WILL NOT NOW BUY. (OF COURSE, DAYAN'S OPPONENTS WILL TRY TO ISOLATE HIM FROM HIS BACKERS AND TO INDUCE THE OTHER RAFI MEMBERS TO STICK TO MRS. MEIR FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN FUTURES, BUT THIS IS A VERY PROBLEMATIC TACTIC.) YET, A NEW ELECTION COULD NOT ONLY PROVE INCONCLUSIVE, BUT PERHAPS ALSO MARK A GENERATIONAL TURN IN THE INTERNAL

BALANCE AND LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOR-ALIGNMENT GROUPING,
WITH MRS. MEIR NO LONGER THE PARTY LEADER.

5. WHILE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT THE MAKE-UP OF
ISRAEL'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN THE WAKE OF A NEW ELEC-
TION, IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD WOULD BE

BITTER AND THAT FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT MIGHT AGAIN
BE PROLONGED. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS HARD TO
SEE HOW SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT THE GOLAN COULD BE
CARRIED FORWARD IN THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD. INDEED, ANY
WILLINGNESS BY THE GOVERNMENT TO GIVE UP QUNAYTRA OR ANY
OTHER OCCUPIED SYRIAN TERRITORY OTHER THAN THE ADDITIONAL
SALIENT CONQUERED LAST OCTOBER COULD ITSELF BECOME A
HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ELECTION ISSUE, FOR WHICH THE BROADLY
APPROVED SUEZ DISENGAGEMENT TALKS LAST DECEMBER PROVIDE
NO VALID ANALOGY.

6. ANOTHER LABOR-LED GOVERNMENT AFTER THE VOTING,
WHOMEVER THE PRIME MINISTER, WOULD PROBABLY BE PREPARED
TO RESUME DISENGAGEMENT EFFORTS WHERE MRS. MEIR HAD LEFT
OFF. HOWEVER, ISRAEL'S POLITICS ARE SO UNSETTLED THAT
THE PROSPECT THAT THE LABOR ALIGNMENT WOULD LOSE EVEN
MORE STRENGTH IS GOOD. INDEED, LIKUD COULD EMERGE AS
ABOUT AS STRONG AS LABOR, ESPECIALLY IF RAFI RAN ON A
SEPARATE LIST. NATURALLY, ANY GOVERNMENT IN WHICH LIKUD
HAD INFLUENCE WOULD PROBABLY STONEWALL AGAINST ANY GOLAN
"WITHDRAWAL", CERTAINLY BEYOND THE OCTOBER 1973
LINE.

7. IT IS QUITE UNLIKELY THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD
MAINTAIN EVEN THE PRESENT RAUCOUS STATUS QUO DURING
THE SEVERAL MONTH PERIOD OF ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL
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TURMOIL WHICH WOULD FOLLOW THE CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS.
SYRIAN ACTIVISM WOULD NOT BE SIMPLY THE QUESTION OF
AN ATTEMPT BY DAMASCUS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A TIME OF
ISRAELI CONFUSION. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE HARD-LINE ANTI-
NEGOTIATION FACTIONS IN SYRIA, WHOM ASAD HAS SEEMINGLY
SIDETRACKED FOR THE TIME BEING, WOULD SEIZE UPON IT AS
A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO DEFLECT HIM FROM HIS COURSE, OR PER-
HAPS TO OUST HIM. IN THESE CONDITIONS, THE PROBABILITY
OF A MAJOR AND FAIRLY EARLY SYRIAN ASSAULT AGAINST
ISRAELI FORCES ON THE GOLAN WOULD BE RATHER HIGH, AND
THE RISK THAT SUCH A MAJOR BREACH OF THE CEASEFIRE IF
NOT RAPIDLY RESTORED, COULD SPREAD TO OTHER ARAB-ISRAELI
FRONTS WOULD BE SUBSTANTIAL.

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